

Make Sushi at Home!

There was a point when your kids' idea of a cultural experience was digging a hole to China in the backyard. Now that they're in middle school, however, kids are ready to enjoy the finer points of cultural exploration, like how people live, work - and especially eat - in other countries. You've probably started them early on pizza and pasta, but the most fun, versatile, and easy-to-make foreign delicacy is Japanese fast food, otherwise known as sushi.

To most people, "sushi" means "raw fish," but this is not necessarily the case. In Japanese, the word "sushi" means "rice snack," and the word has come to describe anything from *kani* (crab) to cucumber and carrot rolls. If your child would sooner eat mud than raw fish, explain that you can make sushi out of anything, especially if you're doing it in your own kitchen!



Here's what you'll need for a sushi-making party:

What You Need:

- Short-grain white rice
- Sushi vinegar (you can make it yourself with $\frac{1}{4}$ cup rice vinegar, 2 tbsp. sugar, and 1 tsp. salt)
- Nori (seaweed sheets)
- Filling (this can be fish, egg, cucumber, avocado, carrots, or anything else you can think of! Think about mixing creamy with crunchy, like smoked salmon, cream cheese, and cucumber, for a well-balanced bite).
- Saucepan or rice cooker
- Cookie sheet or wide tub to cool rice
- Wooden spoon or spatula
- Bamboo sushi rolling mat
- Cutting board
- Sharp knife

What You Do:

1. Many people recommend that you rinse the rice before cooking, but it's not essential. Use equal parts water and rice. Bring to a boil, then simmer until most of the water is absorbed. Turn off the heat and let rice steam for a while longer.
2. While the rice is cooking, make your sushi vinegar by heating the ingredients until dissolved. When the rice is finished, spread it on a wide shallow surface (cookie sheets and wide bowls or tubs work well). Sprinkle your sushi vinegar mixture evenly over the rice, and cut it in using slicing motions with a wooden spoon or spatula (mixing the rice makes it mushy). Then cool the rice with a fan or plate – this will help the rice stay sticky.
3. Next step is to cut the nori sheet in half (scissors work best), and place it on the rolling mat, long end parallel to the bamboo. To spread the rice, use your hands! It's much better than a spoon, which is likely to crush the grains, and it's fun to feel the sticky texture. Prevent the rice from sticking to you by rinsing your hands with *tezu*, a mixture of equal parts water and rice vinegar. Spread the rice onto the sheet, leaving about $\frac{3}{4}$ inch of the nori bare. You'll use this later to seal the roll.
4. Next, add your ingredients, making sure they are evenly distributed lengthwise along the open roll. With both hands, fold the bottom of the bamboo mat over your roll. Next, gently squeeze as you roll it up until the bare nori seals the roll, making sure to compress it evenly. If it doesn't seal, use a bit of the *tezu* to make it stick.

5. With a sharp knife, cut the roll in half, then line the two halves up and cut each piece into thirds, making six pieces. When you've got enough rolls to satisfy your creativity, it's time to satisfy your stomach! Don't forget soy sauce and chopsticks to finish things off.
6. Though your child may swear by burgers and apple pie, it's important to introduce him to different food concepts and, by extension, different cultures. Eating sushi is a great way to start a conversation about Japan, for example. Ask your child why the Japanese have an affinity for fish, and use this as a jumping-off point to discuss the country's geography and neighbors. By expanding his knowledge of different foods, you are teaching him the value of cultures that are different from his own, and ensuring that his stomach will travel the world, even if he won't get off the couch!

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